

LYLIA HALFKENNY

1870-1897, Dorchester, New Brunswick



FIRST BLACK MARITIME-BORN PERSON TO GRADUATE FROM
A MARITIME POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION

Raised in Dorchester, New Brunswick, Lalia Halfkenny was the first Black person born in the Maritimes to graduate from a post-secondary institution in the region. She attended Acadia Ladies' College (Wolfville, Nova Scotia), an affiliate of Acadia University, graduating in 1889. Halfkenny predates other Black Maritimers who attended universities in the region, including Acadia University's Edwin Howard Borden (1892) and Dalhousie's James Robinson Johnston (1896). Only Arthur St. George Richardson, who graduated from the University of New Brunswick in 1886, attended a Maritime institution before her, though he was born in Bermuda. When leaving Acadia Ladies' College, Halfkenny was one of the top students in her year, noted as a gifted orator and elocutionist. She then moved to Richmond, Virginia, where she taught English and elocution at Hartshorn Memorial College, a historically Black college focused on women's education. Hartshorn was amongst the most prestigious institutions in its day, producing some of the highest-ranked students in the country, Black or white. When she was hired, Halfkenny was one of only two Black teaching faculty at Hartshorn. She later fell ill and passed away at the age of 27; her students in Virginia held a large service in her memory, though her formal funeral took place in Wolfville, NS.

Image: 1890, Acadia Archives, Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S.